

Cinefan 2003

By Ron Holloway

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CINEMAYA FESTIVAL OF ASIAN CINEMA – CINEFAN 2003

Fifteen years ago, back in the autumn of 1988, a very informative and highly readable film magazine called *Cinemaya* hit the stands at a few key international film festivals. Published in New Delhi by Aruna Vasudev, an Indian critic and film historian who had been educated in Paris, it beat the drum for Asian cinema and filmmakers so loudly and effectively that soon all the major film festivals took notice. And when she engaged a cohort of able international writers to submit articles, interviews, and festival reports to *Cinemaya*, the next step was a logical one: the founding in 1990 of the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC) at a UNESCO conference held in New Delhi. With a membership that includes 16 Asian countries, plus 8 associate members, the Network was strong enough to assemble its own NETPAC juries at the festivals that counted the most: Pusan, Singapore, CineManila, Yamagata (Documentary), Taipei (Documentary), Dhaka, Venice, Karlovy Vary, Rotterdam, Amiens, Brisbane, and the International Forum of Young Cinema at the Berlinale.

In 1999, Vasudev capped this movement with a film festival of her own: Cinefan in New Delhi, supported enthusiastically by Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of New Delhi. Cinefan arrived on the scene at just the right time. At the dawn of the new millennium, the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), India's major film event alternating annually between New Delhi and a genuine Indian film capital (Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Trivandrum), was on the decline. Reason? Each of India's heavily populated "film cities" wanted their own film festival. Indeed, some of these have since prospered - particularly Mumbai (Bombay), but also Kolkata (Calcutta) and Trivandrum in Kerala. As for New Delhi, since it's not a film production centre, a different image was required - an international festival presenting only Asian films (or otherwise Asian-oriented) with a significant input from Asian embassies and cultural centres based in Delhi. Back then, at the first Cinefan five festivals ago, some 20 films were screened at the Habitat, the festival's lone venue, with but a handful of guests and delegates to join in the fun.

However, the word spread. Today, for the 5th Cinefan (18-27 July 2003), festival programmer Indu Shrikent could boast of 75 films from 30 countries booked for screenings in three venues: Habitat, Siri Fort, and the French Institute, each with large halls to handle overflow crowds. The festival opened with the Indian premiere of Zhang Yimou's *Ying xiong* (*Hero*, China), an actioner that startled audiences at the Berlinale last February. The festival centerpiece was another crowd-pleaser: the Asian premiere of Nagesh Kukunoor's *Teen deewarein* (*Three Walls*, India), a prison drama starring a quartet of popular Indian actors: Om Puri, Juhi Chawla, Naseeruddin Shah, and actor-director Kukunoor himself. It closed with the world premiere of *Paanch* (*Five*, India), the adventures of five members of a Mumbai rockband that call themselves "Parasites."

As for the Cinefan Festival Prize, the International Jury awarded it to Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Uzak* (*Distant*, Turkey), a portrait of solitude and loneliness set in Istanbul against an uncommon wintry landscape. Coincidentally, the *Distant* fit aptly into a two-day seminar, supported by an exhibition and a film series, on "Notions of Solitude" conducted by Cinemaya's Latika Padgaonkar. Midway through the festival, word reach Sri Lanka director Prasanna Vithanage that his recently completed film *Ira madiyama* (*August Sun*) had been accepted for the competition at the Montreal World Film Festival. There he will compete against Gautam Ghose's *Abar Aranye* (*In the Forest Again*, India), the Bengali director's homage to his mentor Satyajit Ray. *In the Forest Again* was voted the Audience Prize at Cinefan.

References

AWARDS

Best Film: *Uzak* (*Distant*, Turkey), dir Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Best Actor: Duan Long, *Drifters* (Taiwan), dir Wang Xiaoshuai

Best Actress: Marina Golbahari, *Osama* (Afghanistan-Japan-Ireland), dir Sedigh Barmak

NETPAC Award: *Drifters* (Taiwan), dir Wang Xiaoshuai

Audience Award: *Abar Aranye (In the Forest Again)*, India, dir Gautam Ghose

Author Information

Ron HOLLOWAY (1933-2009) was an American critic, film historian, filmmaker and correspondent who adopted Europe as his home in the early fifties and spent much of his life in Berlin. He was an expert on the study of German cinema and against all odds produced, with his wife Dorothea, the journal *German Film*, keeping us up-to-date with the work of directors, producers and writers and the showing of German films around the world.

In 2007, Ron Holloway and his wife were awarded the Berlinale Camera Award. Ron also received the Bundesverdienstkreuz (German Cross of Merit), Polish Rings, Cannes Gold Medaille, the American Cinema Foundation Award, the Diploma for Support of Russian Cinema and an honorary award from the German Film Critics' Association.

Ron was also a valued contributor to *Kinema* for the past fifteen years.